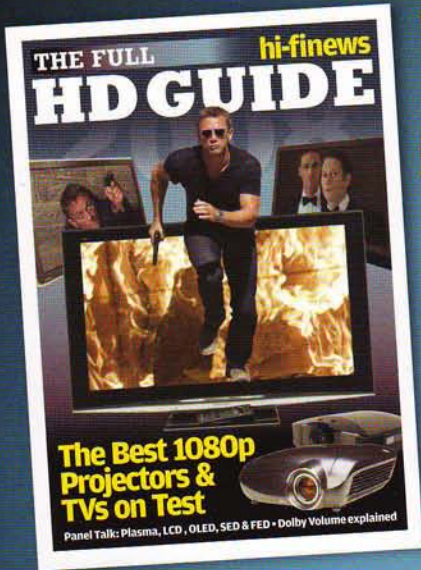


hi-fi news

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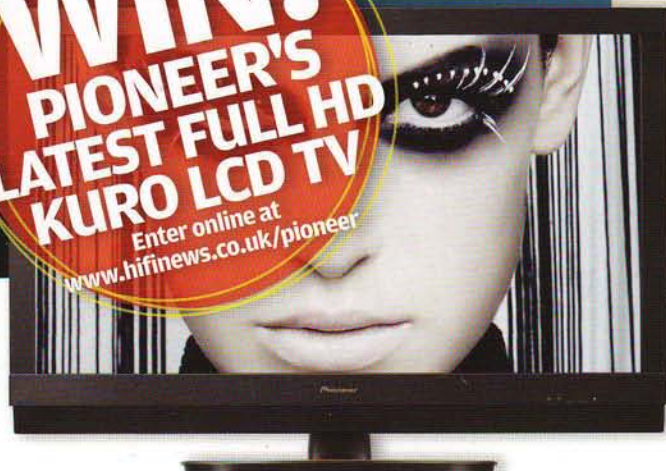
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HIGH-END SPEAKER SPECIAL

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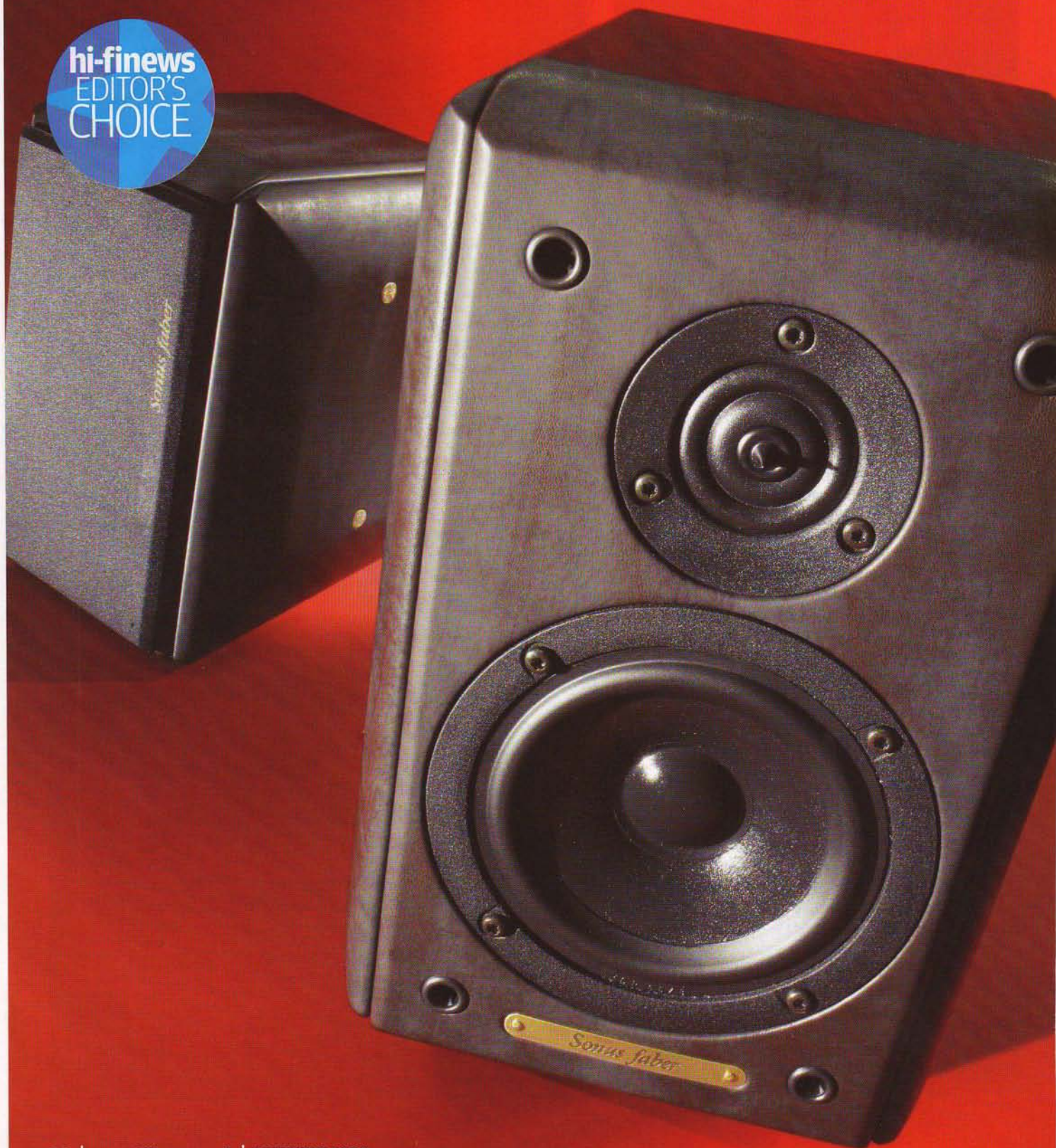
iPod docks on test
Could these docks replace your CD player?

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SONUS FABER TOY (£745)

The smallest, cutest Sonus faber yet proves it's no mere plaything

hi-finews
EDITOR'S
CHOICE



Whether it's bravery, a weak grasp of colloquial English or a misguided belief that some wag *won't* abuse the name, Sonus faber has anointed its smallest-ever two-way with the moniker 'Toy Speaker'. Undoubtedly, as its literature proclaims, it chose that tag because it suggests joy: 'Toys have always been synonymous with happiness and surprise.' And – cynical rotters aside – the first reaction you'll have when you see the new baby is not that the name contains an intrinsic insult, but that the product is, well, *adorable*.

Although deeper than an LS3/5a, it is narrower and shorter at 265x185x270mm (hwd). It's also prettier, probably prettier than any tiny speaker I can name that purports to offer sound of true hi-fi quality. It is obviously a product from Sonus faber, and you'd know it even if you first saw it *sans grille*, where the name runs down the right-hand edge.

You tell me where the compromises were made: It has a sloped front baffle, curved edges, the same 25mm ring radiator tweeter with lethal centre piece found throughout the range, coming in at 4500Hz above a 110mm coated cellulose cone woofer. The back contains the port at the top, and a pair of superb multi-way terminals. Remove the grille, and there's the signature Sonus faber antiqued metal badge, and the sides feature gilded bolt-heads.

Best of all, the Toy Speaker boasts a new finish, which may account for the manner in which they were able to price these at £745 per pair without sacrificing any sense of luxury. Instead of wooden sides, the Toy is finished in what they call 'barred black leather', a semi-matte finished hide that wouldn't shame a well-cut jacket. I have no idea what 'barred leather' means, and Googling it took me to a gay S&M site, so let's just say it looks terrific.

While suitable for shelf-mounting – probably the way most customers will take advantage of this diminutive speaker – I used them as I would LS3/5As, on 24in-tall stands. Like their dearer siblings, they benefit from a bit of toe-in. However, they were less in need of it than, say, Guarneri Homage or Auditor Ms. Wired with Yter cable to the McIntosh MC2102 power amp, the Toys betrayed their 87dB sensitivity: these do need a bit of power if you want them to fill a room greater than 4x5m.

TOY LAND

This minute speaker is no one-off: seen at the TOP Audio show in Milan were a matching centre channel and floorstanders, styled exactly as you'd expect of what are elongated Toys. Also needed, though, to complete the set, is a Toy subwoofer if one is to assemble a 5.1 surround sound package. The potential for this series is huge, so I'd be surprised if we don't one day see a matching iPod dock, too.



ABOVE: A single set of gold-plated binding posts suffice for this miniature

A word about the grilles: because, as you'll see, the speakers are seriously bass-light, they sound smoother and less peaky with the grilles in place. Treble response is not an issue with the Toy and the midband is of the to-die-for variety, but they sound like what they are: small monitors.

AUDIO FILE

A ported two-way that's even smaller than an LS3/5A

Manufacturer: Sonus faber

Supplied by: Absolute Sounds

Telephone: 0208 971 3909

Web: www.absolutesounds.com

UP AGAINST THE WALL

Which is not to say that they aren't equally at home in a 'bijou high-end' context. If anything, you'll need familiar material with crucially important bass content to flirt with anything that approaches dissatisfaction. My mistake, as it were, was to use as my first track the opener to the new Rory Block tribute to Son House, 'Blues Walkin' Like Man', which features just her vocals and her bottleneck guitar work. Because there was no bass content to speak of, I just reeled back into my chair, thinking, 'Holy cow! A rival for the LS3/5a!'

That was soon dispelled when I fed it some well-orchestrated Ella Fitzgerald circa 1962, *The Times'* freebie of the Doors' *Strange Days* and the soundtrack to *The Sound of Music*. Above a certain point, all was magic, with a gloriously wide and deep soundstage, extending well beyond the speakers' outer edges. Vocals

'I have no idea what 'barred leather' means; Googling it took me to a gay S&M site...'

were both warm and natural, especially suiting the clarity of Ms Fitzgerald, and the textures of Jim Morrison. The electric keyboards on the Doors' recordings were rich and suitably ringing, while the strings behind Ella bore the sheen that keeps me wedded to Sonus faber's Cremona Auditor Elipsa.

But, and this is a huge 'but', the Toy simply doesn't provide enough weight away from the walls to satisfy as a full-range speaker. Which reminded me of another small speaker designed not for stand mounting away from walls, but for shelf mounting that exploits the proximity of a rear wall: Wilson's Duette.

Now I have gotten myself into a lot of trouble for swearing by them in stand-mount mode, but then they are considerably larger than the Toys. That aside, ☺



ABOVE: It's the same 25mm ring radiator tweeter found in the Cremona Centa M, above a coated cellulose woofer

they were voiced for near-wall positioning, as – I suspect – were the Toys. Removed from their stands and sited near enough to the walls so as not to interfere with the rear port – about 150mm – the augmentation added just enough bass to fill in the region below to change one's assessment.

I have no doubt that, like Wilson vendors, retailers selling Sonus fabers will soon learn to demonstrate them in shelf- or wall-mount mode.

QUESTION OF PERCEPTION

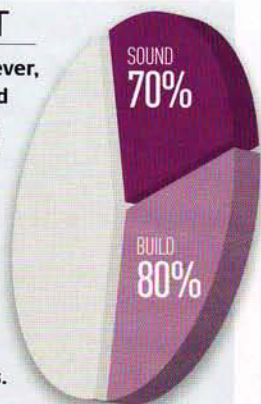
Curiously, there was no terrible side effect as regards the soundstage. Depending on whether or not they have clear space to the sides, the stage width and focus will be unaffected. If, though, they're packed in-between books or CDs or LPs, a hint of congestion emerges. The tonal balance changed only in terms of perception: there was now a semblance of bass, the top-to-bottom balance improved, and some might even consider removing the grilles when the Toys sit on shelves.

Returning to the Rory Block recordings, clearly audible 'body' was added to the sound of the guitar, while scale remain unchanged. Both the orchestrated Ella and the Sound of Music soundtrack enjoyed greater room-filling properties. While the net effect hardly emulated the sudden arrival of a subwoofer, the Toy took on an entirely more satisfactory character.

Just for a laugh, I tried the Toys with a couple of subwoofers I happen to have, including a small Zingali and MartinLogan's Descent. The transformation? I can only describe it as radical. Roll on, then, a dedicated powered Toy sub. They could call it the Toy Chest. ☺

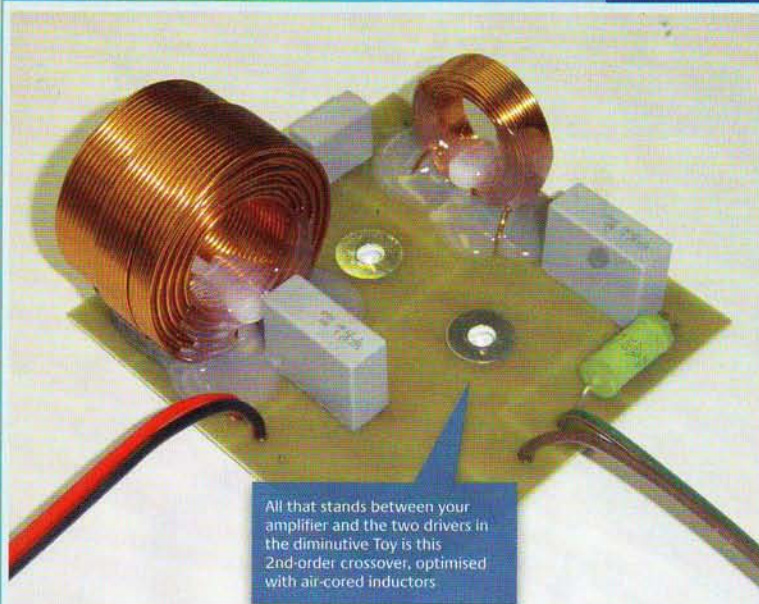
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Sonus faber's smallest speaker ever, the Toy is a solution for cramped flats and second systems, etc. It is not, however, a substitute for the Minima Vintage or Auditor M, both able to offer satisfying amounts of bass when on stands. If sited near walls, though, the Toy is, from 150Hz on up, classic Sonus faber, and a perfect match for the more powerful all-in-one mini-systems.



SONUS FABER TOY LOUDSPEAKER / £745

hi-finews
LAB
RESULTS



All that stands between your amplifier and the two drivers in the diminutive Toy is this 2nd-order crossover, optimised with air-cored inductors

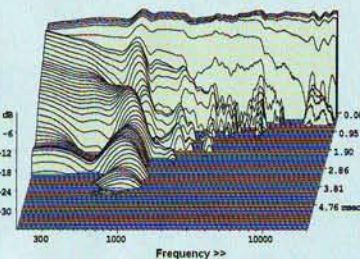
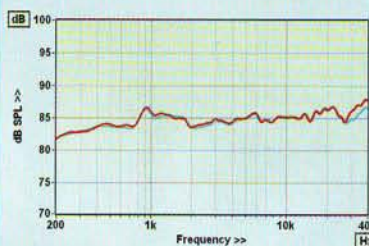
HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Like the Cremona M before it, the Toy appears to mark a sea-change in Sonus faber design philosophy. The uneven on-axis output of old is being replaced by flatter frequency response, which in the case of the Toy is of an accuracy few competitors succeed in matching. Response errors of $\pm 2.4\text{dB}$ (200Hz-20kHz) for both speakers of the review pair put the Toy in the top rank, while the pair matching error of only $\pm 0.4\text{dB}$ is simply the best I have measured from any speakers to pass in front of my measurement microphone.

Pink noise sensitivity is on the low side at 84.6dB (over 2dB lower than the specified 87dB) but you'd expect this result given the Toy's diminutive size. The measured LF extension of 44Hz would be bending the laws of physics: in fact the Toy's diffraction-corrected near-field

response first dips below -6dB (re. 200Hz) at 78Hz before staging a brief recovery, and the output is in gentle decline below 500Hz. A minimum impedance modulus of 6.5ohm at 336Hz fits well with the nominal impedance of 8ohm, and the benign nature of the load is confirmed by a minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) of a perfectly reasonable 3.3ohm at 5.3kHz.

As expected, the small bass driver, which has an effective cone diameter of only about 86mm, struggles to maintain low distortion at moderately high bass output levels, recording 5% THD at 90dB SPL at 100Hz. Fortunately its THD is better at higher frequencies falling to 1% through the mid and 0.2% in the high treble. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall is also mostly clean bar an obvious resonant ridge at about 900Hz. KH



ABOVE LEFT: Very flat frequency response with good pair matching
ABOVE RIGHT: There's a mild resonance visible on the spectral decay waterfall at 900Hz but the cabinet is otherwise well-controlled

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| Sensitivity – mean/IEC/music (SPL at 1m for 2.83Vrms) | 85.3 / 84.6 / 84.7dB |
| Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz) | 6.5ohm @ 336Hz 36ohm @ 102Hz |
| Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz) | -50° @ 4.4kHz 42° @ 76Hz |
| Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz) | $\pm 0.4\text{dB}$ |
| LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz) | 44Hz / $>40\text{kHz}$ / $>40\text{kHz}$ |
| THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m) | 5.0% / 1.0% / 0.2% |